June field trips and meeting cancelled

The Pandemic Future - Gene Bullock

It’s hard to predict how the pandemic will impact our lives and priorities in the months and years ahead. It may be a while before organizations like Kitsap Audubon can feel comfortable about encouraging people to congregate at indoor public meetings. While Kitsap Audubon’s survival doesn’t depend on these in-person gatherings, staying connected may be a challenge. Answering this challenge has become a major focus for the Kitsap Audubon Board. In the long run, workable solutions can’t be “all or nothing;” but we will err on the side of safety.

Someone quipped that the positive side of “self-isolation” is that you don’t have to look your best. You can achieve significant energy savings by skipping daily showers, shaves, cosmetics and changes of clothing.

The absence of birdwatchers from forest trails caused by the pandemic may have also reduced stress on birds occupied with courtship, reproduction and survival. And the reduction in travel has helped air quality and lowered levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

Another positive development is that birdwatching has soared in popularity during the pandemic as stay-at-home individuals and families rediscover the wonders of spring migration and the resulting bird activity in backyards and nearby parks everywhere.

Helping birds close to home

Despite limitations imposed by the pandemic on travel and social distancing, there are lots of things we can do to help birds, such as avoiding the use of toxic chemicals, keeping our cats indoors, making windows less prone to collision, and replacing high-maintenance lawns with native plants and shrubs.

The pandemic may cause a shift in lifestyles and expectations. But it should not distract us from the growing urgency of dealing with climate change and the overuse of herbicides and pesticides, which are decimating global populations of birds and insects.

Special thanks

. . . to all our members and friends who made generous donations to Kitsap Audubon during the Kitsap Great Give.
The 2020 Kingfisher Award has been awarded posthumously to Connie Bickerton for her outstanding service to Kitsap Audubon. The Kingfisher Award is Kitsap Audubon’s highest honor, and is given annually to an individual or couple who have given outstanding service to Kitsap Audubon for five or more years.

In September 2014 Connie volunteered to create and maintain a Facebook page for Kitsap Audubon, and was invited to join the Board. She remained a very active Board member, also serving as secretary, until her untimely death on October 30, 2019.

Connie was instrumental in reviving the North Kitsap-Port Gamble Christmas Bird Count circle, which had been dormant for 16 years; and, with Jennifer Standish, co-led the Port Ludlow field team. In 2017 she was also a member of a team of local birders that won Alaska Audubon’s Great American Arctic Birding Challenge. For the past three years she has been counting birds in Suquamish for the Puget Sound Seabird Survey sponsored by Seattle Audubon. She was also a Salish Sea Marine Naturalist, a member of Kitsap Beach Watchers, and a Salmon Docent.

Connie served on the Board of Directors for Sound Action, a nonprofit that works to protect near-shore forage fish habitat.

Connie was known for her skills and talent as a wildlife photographer. Her photographs have been widely published. She photographed 256 species of birds in 2017.

Recipients of the Kingfisher Award are selected by the previous three recipients. The 2020 recipient was chosen by Al Westphal, Diane Bachen and Michael Szerlog.

Connie Bickerton was known for her skills and talents as a photographer. Her photos below show an Osprey family, and humpback whales joining a feeding frenzy near Point No Point County park.

99% decline in Monarch butterflies

Once numbering in the millions, there are only 29,000 western monarch butterflies left in California. That’s a 99% population decline of these essential pollinators. And we’re not only losing monarchs -- 40% of invertebrate pollinators are on the brink of extinction. If we lose them, it will be catastrophic for the ecosystems and food systems on which we rely.

And it’s mainly driven by the pervasive and indiscriminate use of pesticides and herbicides, by industrial agriculture, along with climate change and habitat loss. One of the worst culprits is Bayer-Monsanto’s Roundup®, which is killing off young Monarch butterflies by eradicating milkweed, their primary food source. Herbicides like Roundup® are also widely used to control weeds along major highways.
Regrettably, the precautions imposed as a result of the coronavirus epidemic have caused us to cancel the entire spring field trips program. We miss you all and hope to get this program up and running again in the fall.

Meanwhile, I hope all of you have made the best of your excess free time to get out to your back yards, and more recently to parks and public areas. My wife Carolyn and I observed the “Global Big Day” on May 9th by commemorating the field trips program with a trip to the Theler Wetland Trails. It was a sunny warm day, and the two of us were able to tally fifty species. We had terrific looks at Common Yellowthroats, Black-throated Gray Warblers, and Warbling Vireos among others. We searched in vain for an early Yellow Warbler, but we were fortunate enough to find two MacGillivray’s Warblers in nearby Tahuya State Forest. The birds are out there. Get out and find them, and perhaps we will see you again in September.

Special thanks to all our trip leaders for the 2019-20 season, including Jamie Acker, Brad Waggoner, George Gerdts, John and Karla Bouck, and Joe Jack Davis!

**Field Trips & Festivals - Al Westphal**

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**Audubon for kids**

[https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids](https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids)

Here is a link to “Audubon for kids,” a page that brings together activities from across Audubon’s national network of environmental educators, including the classroom curriculum Audubon Adventures, plus related DIY activities and content from Audubon’s editors. These activities can be done at home or in a yard or park, sometimes with the help of a computer. The goal isn’t to teach a child how to name and identify bird species, but rather to give them space to explore and feel connected to the natural world. We hope these lessons, which we’ll refresh each week with a new theme, will help you and your child find awe and inspiration in nature together.
A unique seabird of Kitsap's Puget Sound waters is the rhinoceros auklet. A member of the alcid family and a close relative of the tufted puffin, it can be found throughout the year, but is most common in late spring and summer. It is often seen along ferry routes and from Point No Point County Park in Hansville. Here are some fascinating facts about the rhinoceros auklet:

• In breeding plumage has white feather tufts on the sides of its head and a “horn,” for which it is named, on a bright orange bill.
• Shaped like a football with wings when flying.
• Eats mostly forage fish that it snares underwater on dives that can last up to 2 minutes.
• Uses its wings for propulsion and its feet as a rudder when swimming underwater.
• Can carry several fish at a time in its bill using special spikes on the back of its upper jaw called “palatal denticles.”
• Colonial nesters on island edges and cliffs. Both males and females use their bills and claws to excavate a burrow up to 20 feet long with a nest chamber at the end which is lined with grass and leaves.
• Only visits the nest burrow at night, possibly to avoid predation.
• Female lays one egg, which both parents incubate for up to 7 weeks. Both parents care for the chick which leaves the nest when 7 or 8 weeks old.
• Purpose of the bill protrusion is a mystery but scientists have found that although it looks gray to us, the “horn” is ultraviolet. Since auklets can see UV light, scientists speculate that it may help the auklets see one another underwater and while visiting their burrows at night.
• Approximately 36,000 pairs breed on Protection Island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca between Sequim and Port Townsend.

Habitat Steward online Workshop

The National Wildlife Federation is offering an online Wildlife Habitat Steward Training series in June. The goal of the training is to teach you how to help others create and restore wildlife habitat in backyards, schoolyards, and other private and public areas. Workshop sessions will take place the first four Tuesdays in June from 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. via Zoom.

During this online workshop, you get to meet and interact with local conservation professionals and other similarly interested folks while participating in this engaging, fun and highly informative training! Expert speakers from the community will present on topics such as: gardening for wildlife, improving water quality, managing noxious weeds, prairie restoration, and more!

The cost of the training is $25 to cover program materials. Note: scholarships are available! No one will be turned down due to lack of funds. To register for the training, please visit: http://thurstonhst.brownpapertickets.com or contact WAEducation@nwf.org or (206) 577-7816.

New Guillemot Survey Regional Coordinator

Whidbey Audubon Society’s Guillemot Research Group, in cooperation with four other Salish Sea Audubon chapters and nature centers, including Kitsap Audubon, has selected Brendan McGarry to serve as Pigeon Guillemot Survey Regional Coordinator for 2020. A coordinating team consisting of Salish Sea Guillemot Network members, including Team Leader and Program Coordinator Frances Wood, will be overseeing his work. Funding is provided by a National Audubon Society Audubon-in-Action Grant, Whidbey Audubon Society, and contributions from participating Audubon chapters, including Kitsap Audubon.
Wildlife Sightings - Janine Schutt

All was quiet on the birding front while everyone was restricted to their backyards and neighborhoods during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order. But once parks were opened again, Kitsap’s birders were out in force to take in what was left of the spring migration. There were multiple sightings of Lazuli buntings on Bainbridge Island and Point No Point County Park in Hansville. On May 7, Amy Shumann near Southworth reported one in her yard along with some evening grosbeaks at her bird bath. John McDonald of Lake Symington enjoyed the arrival of spring migrants in his yard, which in April and May included violet-green swallows, purple finches, Wilson’s, Townsend’s, orange-crowned and black-throated gray warblers, Hammond’s and Pacific-slope flycatchers, black-headed grosbeaks, and Swainson’s thrushes. In August, be sure to send your interesting summer sightings to me at jeschutt@hotmail.com.

Notable Kitsap Bird Sightings from www.eBird.org:
April 6 on Bainbridge Island: 1 Say’s phoebe, 5 mountain bluebirds, 1 western meadowlark
April 9 by Wildcat Lake (near Seabeck): 1 ruffed grouse
April 23 in Port Orchard: 126 snow geese flying high overhead
April 30 near Suquamish: 1 Nashville warbler
May 3 at Foulweather Bluff (Hansville): 3 black scoters, 34 Wilson’s warblers
May 4 on Bainbridge Island: 1 chipping sparrow
May 5 near Hansville: 2 long-billed dowitchers, 1 solitary sandpiper, 1 dusky flycatcher
May 5 in Port Orchard: 1 lesser goldfinch
May 9 near Mission Lake (by Mason Co. line): 2 western bluebirds
May 9 at Point No Point: 1 Swainson’s hawk, 1 bank swallow
May 10 at Point No Point: 1 Townsend’s solitaire
May 11 at Point No Point: 1 whimbrel
May 11 at Green Mountain: 4 mountain quails, 1 northern pygmy-owl
May 13 at Point No Point: 35 evening grosbeaks
May 13 at Lake Symington (near Seabeck): 1 American dipper

Photo of Lazuli Bunting by Janine Schutt.
The mission of the Kitsap Audubon Society is to preserve the natural world through education, environmental study and habitat protection, and to promote awareness and enjoyment of local and regional natural areas.

Visit our website at www.kitsapaudubon.org